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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines criteria for the award of certificates and associate in arts (A.A.), associate in science (A.S.), and associate in applied science (A.A.S.) degrees in Colorado community colleges. Certificate programs, regardless of their duration, are defined as those designed primarily to lead to employment immediately upon completion and which heavily emphasize skills required for employment. Two-year certificate programs are expected to decline; these must be justified by evidence that the need for skill courses is so great that insufficient time remains for the general education courses normally required for the A.A.S. degree. A minimum of 64 semester credit hours or 96 quarter credit hours is established for associate degrees. For the associate in arts, traditionally awarded to graduates of transfer programs, minimum requirements in the humanities and sciences are outlined. While the associate in science is acceptable for transfer programs leading to baccalaureate degrees in scientific fields, the Board favors its use for occupational programs emphasizing high level cognitive skills, and further stipulates that A. S. programs must emphasize preparation for job entry. One-half of the credit hours for such programs must be in general education areas, while one-fourth to one-third are required in general education for associate in applied science programs, designed for immediate job entry in technical occupations. (MB)

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CRITERIA FOR ASSOCIATE DEGREE PROGRAMS AND CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

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COLORADO STATE BOARD FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION

CRITERIA FOR ASSOCIATE DEGREE PROGRAMS AND CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

The enumerated duties of the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education include the following:

- To recommend and review proposals for the establishment of curriculums and for major changes in curriculums subject only to the review function of the commission on higher education relating to formal academic programs.[1]

- To define the requirements of appropriate degrees and certificates and to authorize the award thereof in the community and technical colleges, subject only to the review function of the commission on higher education relating to formal academic programs.[2]

Certificate Programs

Certificate programs, regardless of their duration, are defined as programs which: (1) are designed primarily to lead to employment immediately upon completion, and (2) heavily emphasize skills required for employment. Alternatively, certificate programs may comprise single courses or small groups of courses intended for job or personal enrichment, or occupational retraining or upgrading.

Certificate programs may range in length from a few days to two years. However, after appropriate degree requirements have been developed, there should be relatively few two-year programs. Those two-year programs which continue to be designated as certificate programs should be justified by evidence that: (1) the full two-year period is necessary to provide adequate occupational training, and (2) that the need for skill courses is so great that insufficient time remains for students to take the arts, science, and humanities courses normally required for programs leading to A.A.S. degrees. This policy is consistent with a recommendation of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education.[3]

Degree Programs

In community colleges nationally, three types of associate degrees predominate. They are the associate in arts (A.A.), the associate in science (A.S.), and the associate in applied science (A.A.S.) degrees. More than 50 other associate degrees have been identified as awarded by two-year colleges, but such other associate degrees do not appear to be in widespread use.[4]

In this section, very tentative requirements are suggested. A task force of community college presidents and deans and state staff members will develop firm requirements during the course of the next year.

All associate degree programs should require a minimum of 64 semester credit hours of 96 quarter credit hours.

The associate in arts (A.A.) degree is traditionally awarded to graduates of community college transfer programs. Minimum requirements include:

- English composition - 6 semester hours or 9 quarter hours
- Humanities (English, American or other national literature, music or art appreciation, philosophy) - 6 semester hours or 9 quarter hours
- Social science (history, sociology, psychology, geography, economics, anthropology) - 6 semester hours of 9 quarter hours
- Natural science (biology, botany, zoology) - 6 semester hours or 9 quarter hours
- Physical science (chemistry, physics, geology) - 6 semester hours or 9 quarter hours

  or Mathematics (college algebra, calculus, analytical geometry) - 6 semester hours or 9 quarter hours

- Pre-professional studies, general education electives, and, if needed, foreign languages - balance of program

There shall be only one A.A. program at each community college. Designated specialties within each A.A. program are considered options, which are minor variations intended for counseling and student self-identification purposes.

The associate in science (A.S.) degree has at least two uses - one for college transfer programs intended to lead to baccalaureate programs in scientific fields and the second for occupational programs that emphasize higher level cognitive skills (mathematics, scientific theory, etc.) to a greater degree than skills of physical manipulation. The latter use emphasizes preparation for immediate job transfer, but also provides for at least limited transferability to senior colleges or universities. The State Board favors the second use with the further proviso that all occupational programs, including A.S. programs, should emphasize preparation for job entry, and should not depart from this purpose merely to satisfy the junior-year admission requirements of senior institutions.[5] Approximately one-half of the credit hours required by A.S. programs should be in the general education category, as illustrated above for A.A. programs, with the remainder allocated to technical or job-related courses designed to prepare students for immediate entry into the labor force.

The associate in applied science (A.A.S.) degree is characteristically awarded to graduates of programs designed to lead to immediate job entry. These technician-level programs should require from one-fourth to one-third of the credit hours to be earned in general education courses. The remainder of the courses required should be designed to emphasize practical applications of science, mathematics, and technology.

Surveys of employers and local occupationsl advisory committees are recommended to develop and periodically revise both A.S. and A.A.S. programs.

When local follow-up studies of occupational program graduates and drop-outs reveal that substantial numbers of students leave to take jobs in related fields without graduating, college authorities should consider adding certificate programs of less than two years' duration either in addition to or in place of the two-year programs.

FOOTNOTES

1. C.R.S. 1973, 23-60-202(e). The State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education interprets the term "formal academic programs" as including only those programs designed primarily for transfer to four-year baccalaureate-granting institutions. Normally, such college transfer programs are designed as culminating in associate in arts (A.A.) degrees. By way of contrast, two-year programs, for which associate in applied science (A.A.S.) degrees are awarded are designed primarily to lead to employment immediately upon completion. Programs for which associate in science (A.S.) degrees are awarded are designed for the immediate purpose of either immediate entry into the labor force or transfer, possibly with some loss of credit, to baccalaureate programs in senior colleges or universities.

2. C.R.S. 1973, 23-60-202(f).

3. A Digest of Reports of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1974, p. 276. The recommendation reads as follows:

> "All two-year colleges should award an associate of arts or an associate in science degree to all students who satisfactorily complete a two-year prescribed curriculum, and students who enter with adequate advanced standing should have the option of earning the associate degree in less than two years. Non-degree credit courses should be confined to short-term courses and to training of the skilled craftsman type, for which certificates should be provided and to remedial work."

4. James Cass and Max Birnbaum, Comparative Guide to Junior and Two-Year Colleges. Harper and Row, New York, 1972, pp. xvii-xviii.

5. Clyde E. Blocker, Robert H. Plummer, and Richard C. Richarson, Jr., The Two-Year College: A Social Synthesis. Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965.

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